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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002189

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UNITED OPPOSITION SHOWING SIGNS OF  
DIVERGING

REF: A. TBILISI 2086  
[1](#)B. TBILISI 1987

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary/Comment: David Gamkrelidze (New Rights) provided poloffs with a view about the future of his party and hinted about that he would leave the united opposition soon. Gamkrelidze confirmed that he is working closely with David Usupashvili (Republicans) to form a new coalition, building on the cooperation evidenced in their joint approach to the November 7 protest led by more radical elements of the united opposition. Gamkrelidze has been in talks with several opposition leaders about moving away from a strategy of street demonstrations and constant calls for new elections toward a more stable, longer term political action plan that focuses more on policy than anti-Saakashvili rhetoric. He is also talking to Nino Burjanadze about cooperation, but a coalition seems unlikely since neither would be willing to cede the top spot in a party. Although the United Opposition still exists, Gamkrelidze's remarks confirm a growing rift between opposition parties with a more radical wing committed to protests and confrontation, and a more moderate wing which is increasingly rejecting that strategy. End Summary/Comment.

#### Realignment in the United Opposition

[1](#)2. (C) During his talk with poloffs, Gamkrelidze focused solely on his political strategy which pointedly did not include any of the more radical extra-parliamentary opposition. He stated that he has come to the conclusion that the opposition needs a credible alternative to President Saakashvili before it can be considered a legitimate electoral option to force democratic reforms. Gamkrelidze said he has been in talks with UN Ambassador Irakli Alasania to lead a coalition of New Rights and Republicans, tacitly acknowledging that neither he nor David Usupashvili is the optimal candidate to fill that role. He said that the new bloc will be announced in December with or without Alasania. (Comment: Alasania appears to have multiple suitors. He is currently being courted by all sides, including President Saakashvili and the UNM, as well as Former Speaker Nino Burjanadze who launched her own party November 23 (septel)). He also is open to other like-minded opposition leaders to join, but noted that discussions with Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) were "difficult". He indicated that funding was still an issue as businessmen were wary of being seen as providing support to opposition parties. Gamkrelidze expressed hope that the GOG would make good on Saakashvili's recent announcement to restore funding to most opposition parties, including those outside of Parliament, giving his movement an infusion of cash.

[1](#)3. (C) When asked about talks with Nino Burjanadze, Gamkrelidze indicated that there had been discussions between their camps, but that he does not expect a coalition to develop between them. (Embassy note: During the run-up to the November 7 protest, both Burjanadze and Gamkrelidze told us that they were in touch to discuss tactics in the days prior to the event. End note.) Gamkrelidze said Burjanadze

is solely focused on being President so any coalition without her at the top is non-negotiable from her side. Gamkrelidze was circumspect about Burjanadze's chances at the top of a ticket. In his view, Burjanadze is too closely tied to the Government; has accusations of corruption swirling around her and her husband; and is not somebody, in his opinion, who voters could rally around as the dominate face of the opposition. Lastly, as a practical matter, Gamkrelidze is doubtful Georgia is ready to elect a woman as President. For his part, Gamkrelidze is open to working with Burjanadze, but sees little chance for any formal coalition with her for the foreseeable future, at least until it becomes clear what her party and its electoral chances look like.

#### Further Cracks

¶4. (C) New Rights and the Republicans also skipped the most recent meeting of opposition leaders with the diplomatic corps. Zviad Dzidziguiri, Kakha Kuvava (Conservatives), Koka Guntsadze (United Opposition), and Eka Beselia (Okruashvili Party) repeated their demands of the GOG (reftel A) and announced their intention to stage more protests. A featured speaker at the November 7 protest, former Minister of Reintegration Goga Khaindrava appeared at the meeting and again lambasted the current U.S. administration and the Ambassador; his speech was described by one observer as "incoherent". Interestingly, Levan Gachechiladze was also absent from the meeting, although no public reason was given. According to IRI, Gachechiladze is discussing a possible coalition with the Conservatives, Okruashvili's Party, and Davitashvili's People's Party so his absence appears to have been a scheduling conflict and not a further sign of

TBILISI 00002189 002 OF 002

disunity. While there has been no official break, the consistent absence of New Rights, Republicans, Burjanadze and her supporters, as well as other more moderate opposition members portend that the United Opposition's days are numbered.

#### Moving Forward

¶5. (C) Gamkrelidze told poloffs that an effective opposition message cannot just be anti-Saakashvili. (Embassy note: This is a message that the USG has long been delivering to the opposition. End note.) He said that at a recent IRI seminar, representatives of New Rights and the Republicans had discussed a platform and ways to deliver a positive message to voters that distinguishes themselves from the other opposition. IRI told us that Gamkrelidze has also been in contact with the Aristotle consulting company and hired a local pollster to canvas public opinion on the opposition. The results of this poll coincided with the recent IRI poll results which showed very small public support for all of the opposition parties and their leaders. Gamkrelidze appears to have taken this message to heart after initially disputing the results of the IRI poll. Gamkrelidze says the public wants stability, not more protests. While he believes there should be new elections, the time is not right and demands for more elections are unrealistic. As such, along with David Usupashvili, he intends to launch a new campaign in January at the grass roots level focusing on a positive agenda. Gamkrelidze noted how impressed he was with President Elect Obama's organization and grass roots focus. He said a similar approach could be effective to increase support for his new coalition.

¶6. (C) Gamkrelidze was less confident when asked about what the coalition's natural constituency would be given that his political views are largely similar to that of the UNM. Gamkrelidze conceded the point in part, but said they would pursue a more non-confrontational approach to Russia, and focus on making Georgia more democratic and transparent. He also cited polling and anecdotal evidence which, in his view, shows that support for the UNM and Saakashvili was fairly

broad, but shallow. Gamkrelidze again cited the opposition's lack of a credible alternative to Saakashvili as a main factor in its lack of public support. He opined that UNM is largely a party of expediency, stating that if Alasania or another credible figure led a more moderate opposition, defections could easily occur. Independently, IRI told us that it could easily see about 15-20 MPs following the recent examples of former PM Zurab Noghaideli and MP Peter Mamradze moving into the opposition if it had a credible leader. When we asked Gamkrelidze about IRI's view, he said that this was a distinct possibility, but he was not overly optimistic. He explained that if MPs join an established party or coalition, the defections will likely have some real political effect. However, Gamkrelidze feels that most defectors, like former PM Noghaideli, only want to be the leaders of their own parties which only serves to muddy the waters and provides little if any political support to the creation of an effective opposition.

TEFFT